The empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011–4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 1993
Reprinted 1997
First paperback edition 2002

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Magdalino, Paul.
The empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180 / Paul Magdalino.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0 521 30571 3
1. Byzantine Empire – History Manuel I Comnenus, 1143–1180.
2. Manuel I Comnenus, Emperor of the East, ca. 1120–1180.
I. Title.
DF607.M34 1993
949.5'03–dc20 92-13501 CIP

ISBN 0 521 30571 3 hardback
ISBN 0 521 52653 1 paperback

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Introduction: problems and sources

The twelfth century was the age of Roger II of Sicily, Henry Plantagenet, Frederick Barbarossa and Saladin. It was also the age of Manuel Komnenos, who ruled the empire of Constantinople from 1143 to 1180. Like his eminent contemporaries, Manuel received more than his fair share of admiration from professional eulogists, yet there can be no doubt that he too provided excellent material for eulogy. Although his accession to the Byzantine throne was sudden, unexpected and precarious, he took control smoothly and efficiently. Only four years later he averted a major crisis when the kings of France and Germany passed through Byzantine territory at the head of huge armies and the king of Sicily took the opportunity to capture Corfu and raid mainland Greece. In addition to many ephemeral successes, Manuel reduced Hungary and the Latin principalities of Outremer to the status of client states. While he reigned, the empire's main centres of population were as secure from internal disorder and foreign invasion as they had ever been. He conducted war and diplomacy on a grand scale and on all fronts. His court was a dazzling display of power and wealth, where state occasions were celebrated with fairy-tale magnificence. It attracted diplomats, exiles and fortune-seekers from many lands. Manuel also received more foreign potentates than any Byzantine emperor before or since: a king of France, a king of Germany, a Turkish sultan, a king of Jerusalem, and a duke of Saxony and Bavaria.

Manuel cut an impressive figure not only through the apparatus of power with which he was surrounded, but also through his personal, often highly individual style of government. He had no need of props in order to dominate the stage on which he moved. He was an indefatigable, daring soldier, who led most of his important campaigns in person and won the affection of his troops by sharing their dangers and discomforts. Like the hero in a Western – or like Digenes Akrites, the hero of the medieval Greek 'Eastern' – Manuel seemed to possess a superhuman ability to take on overwhelming

numbers of armed assailants, and wild beasts that were larger than life. Like Digenes, too, he enjoyed aristocratic luxury with equal gusto. Yet, unlike Digenes, he felt just as much at ease in the refined urban world of Constantinople as he did on the wild frontier. He liked to surround himself with intellectuals, and to show that he could meet them on their own ground. He composed his own speeches. He prided himself on his medical knowledge. He dabbled in astrology and wrote a treatise in its defence, yet this did not prevent him from taking a keen interest in theology and presiding over doctrinal disputes as the arbiter of Orthodoxy.

Manuel's learning was no doubt superficial compared with that of the men of letters who were obliged to praise him as their intellectual equal. Yet it allowed him to bridge the traditional gulf between the two elites of the Byzantine ruling class: the metropolitan, bureaucratic elite, and the military elite. In sacrificing both to Hermes and to Ares, as his eulogists put it, he displayed a balance which none of his illustrious predecessors had managed to achieve. He had all the urbanity, liberality, sophistication and sense of ceremonial occasion which had made the 'philosopher' emperors – Leo VI, Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, Constantine IX Monomachos, Constantine X Doukas – popular with the civilian elite and the common people of the capital. At the same time, he had the ruthless independence of mind and ability to dispense with convention which had characterised the great soldier emperors: Nikephoros II Phokas, John I Tzimiskes, and Basil II 'the Bulgar-slayer'. He could be surprisingly informal, as when he treated Baldwin III of Jerusalem for a broken arm. His originality also showed itself in more profound ways. Towards the end of his life he forced the Church of Constantinople to modify the catechism for converts from Islam so as to allow for the recognition that Muslims and Christians worshipped the same deity. He attempted to create a new role for his ancient empire in a Christian world where the vital forces were now the warriors, clergy and merchants of Latin Europe. He devoted more than thirty years of his life to building an international order in which Byzantium might regain its ascendancy not by opposing but by directing the rise of the West, and western Christians might recognise the Byzantine emperor as the natural champion of their own values. Manuel was the first Byzantine emperor since Theophilos (829–42) to attract comment for his obvious penchant for a foreign culture; he was the first ever to gain a reputation as a friend and admirer of the Latin West.

To the rhetors of his court Manuel was the 'divine emperor' (θεῖος/ ἔνθεος βασιλεύς), an incarnation of renewal (ἀναναίνισις) and perpetual motion (ἀεικινησία), a true imitator of Christ who was all things to all men and would not shrink from making the ultimate

sacrifice for the good of his people.[1] A generation after Manuel's death, Michael Choniates referred to him as 'the most blessed among emperors',[2] and a century later John Staurakios described him as 'Manuel great in fine deeds . . . accomplished and great in learning, most lavish in his imperial majesty and like Solomon in brilliance, a lover of beauty and finery'.[3] The emperor enjoyed a similar reputation in parts of the Latin world. A Genoese annalist noted that with the passing of 'Lord Manuel of divine memory, the most blessed emperor of Constantinople . . . all Christendom incurred great ruin and detriment'.[4] William of Tyre, the historian of the crusader states, called Manuel 'the most powerful and wealthy prince of the world'; 'a wise and discreet prince of great magnificence, worthy of praise in every respect'; 'of illustrious memory and loving remembrance in Christ, whose favours and liberal munificence nearly everyone had experienced'.[5] A hundred years later, at the other end of the Mediterranean, a Catalan chronicler recalled that Manuel 'was at that time the best man among Christians'.[6]

Modern historians, however, have been less enthusiastic about Manuel Komnenos; the emperor does not emerge from textbooks of medieval or Byzantine history as one of the outstanding rulers of his age. He is not celebrated for his statesmanship, and no national or ideological movement has glorified his memory. Three reasons may be suggested for this neglect. First, the great power which Manuel wielded was not solely or even mainly his own personal achievement, but that of the dynasty of which he represented the third generation. The wealth, the military machine, and the internal stability on which both depended had been painstakingly constructed by his grandfather Alexios I (1081–1118) and his father John II (1118–43). While it is clear that Manuel used these assets to the full, it is not so clear how much he added to them, and there is room for doubt as to whether he used them to best effect. His greatest military campaign, his grand expedition against the Turkish Sultanate of Konya, ended in humiliating defeat, and his greatest diplomatic effort apparently collapsed the next year when Pope Alexander III became reconciled to the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa at the Peace of Venice. Second, Byzantine imperial power declined so rapidly after Manuel's death that it is only natural to look for the causes of this decline in his reign and in his policies. Thirdly, and perhaps most

[1] See below, chapter 6.
[2] Mich. Chon., I, p. 322.
[3] John Staurakios, ed. Ioakeim Ivirites, in *Μακεδονικά*, 1 (1940), p. 368.
[4] *Annali Genovesi*, II, pp. 14–15.
[5] WT, pp. 834, 942, 977; tr. Babcock and Krey, II, pp. 264–5, 378, 414.
[6] Quoted by Hecht, 'Kaiserin', p. 169; see also ibid., p. 162, for mentions of Manuel by troubadours.

fundamentally, modern historians have, in the main, based their estimate of Manuel not on the one-sided judgements of his admirers, who include his main biographer John Kinnamos, but on the more critical and profound account of his reign that is to be found in the *History* of Niketas Choniates.[7]

Choniates found much to admire in Manuel. He shared the emperor's ideals, and basically approved of the ends for which he worked. As Joan Hussey has remarked, 'he would have been astonished to read the verdict of certain modern scholars, that "if any man is to be held responsible for the disaster of 1204, it is Manuel Comnenus" '.[8] Yet the text of Choniates provides all the material on which this verdict is based. In the course of the seven books which he devotes to Manuel, the author identifies several aspects of the emperor's personality and policies that made him less than perfect as a ruler.

In Book I, writing of Manuel's march to Constantinople to take control after his acclamation by the army in Cilicia, Choniates mentions that two of the emperor's relatives, Andronikos Komnenos and Theodore Dasiotes, were captured by the Turks when they turned off the road to go hunting, but Manuel was so intent on reaching Constantinople 'that he did not concern himself with them as he should, nor avenge them in a way befitting an emperor'.[9] On the subject of the emperor's first marriage to the German princess Bertha-Eirene, Choniates points out that the promiscuity of youth made Manuel an unfaithful husband,

> who was completely uninhibited with regard to sexual liaisons, went down on many females and, taking no heed, even unlawfully fastened his buckle through a hole related to him by blood. This act was a stain on him, disfiguring and spreading ugliness, like outbreaks of warts or leprosy on a handsome face.[10]

Book I then goes on to describe the administration of Manuel's early years, emphasising his boundless generosity at this time. However,

> the emperor did not keep to these good intentions, for as he grew to manhood, he dealt with matters more autocratically, treating his subjects not as free men but as if they were servants who had been bequeathed to him, and halted – not to say reversed – the flow of largesse, and redistributed even where he had solemnly confirmed. I do not think this was due so much to conscious policy – in doubt one must always incline to charity – as to the fact

[7] See, in general, the introductions to the respective translations by Brand and Magoulias, and Hunger, *Literatur*, I, pp. 394–426, 429–41; for further bibliography, see below, chapter 5, n. 265.
[8] J. M. Hussey, *The Byzantine world* (London, 1957), pp. 62–3.
[9] Chon., p. 50.
[10] Chon., p. 54.

that what he needed was not a normal measure of gold, but rather a Tyrrhenian Sea, having greatly extended his range of expenses, as my account will reveal as it proceeds.[11]

The remainder of Book I is concerned with the passage of the Second Crusade through Byzantine territory in 1147–8. Like the other Byzantine writers who recorded the event, Choniates commends Manuel's courteously defensive handling of the crusader armies and the threat which they posed to the empire's security. Yet in contrast to the other Greek sources, Choniates presents the crusade as a genuinely religious enterprise, and, in common with some non-Greek accounts, suggests that many Greeks, including the emperor, deliberately sabotaged it. The townspeople of Asia Minor, he says, cheated the Latins who bought food from them, pitying them neither as strangers nor as Christians:

> Whether the emperor really ordered this, as was alleged, I do not know for certain, but certainly unlawful and unholy things were done. It was undoubtedly the emperor's decision, unambiguous and undisguised by a veil of falsehood, to mint coin from impure silver and give it to those of the Italian [*sic*] army who wanted change. In short, there was no horror which the emperor did not devise and order others to perform, that these things might be ineradicable reminders to their descendants, and germs of fear to deter them from any future movement against the Roman people. It was then left for the Turks to do similar things against the Alamanoi, with the emperor stirring them up with letters and inciting them to war.[12]

Book II deals with Manuel's reaction to the invasion of Greece by Roger II of Sicily, and the wars which followed in the Balkans and southern Italy. On the whole, Choniates does not criticise imperial policy here, and seems to approve the general principle behind the emperor's costly and unsuccessful Italian venture, that attack is the best form of defence.[13] Even the disastrous failure of the expedition is not blamed on Manuel, who is commended for having refused to give way to despair and prepared a new expedition under Constantine Angelos. Choniates reserves his criticism for the emperor's faith in astrology, which influenced his timing of the fleet's departure:

> Manuel believed, and not commendably, that the fortunes and encounters of human life are assisted by the reverse and forward motions of the stars, the positions and the various configurations of the planets, and all the other things that the astrologers talk about, denying Divine Providence and perversely applying the maxims 'it is fated', and 'what is ordained by necessity

[11] Chon., p. 60.
[12] Chon., pp. 66–7; cf. Hendy, *Studies*, pp. 518–9. As Choniates' editor notes, the author appears to confuse the French and German crusading armies.
[13] Chon., p. 89.

and cannot be undone'. So he had a perfect sailing worked out for Angelos. Yet just as he had worked out Constantine's departure, what happened? The sun had hardly begun to set when Constantine retraced his steps on the emperor's orders. The reason was the unpropitious nature of the exit and the fact that Angelos had begun his voyage not as the favourable combinations of stars ordained or indeed as the letter of the laws governing the astral plane allowed, but as idle speculators had recommended, uttering wrong judgements and applying crude minds to subtle matters, and erring in their calculation of the favourable moment. So once more the horoscope was cast and the tables were examined. And thus after much examination and deliberation and searching of the stars, Angelos departed, moving out in harmony with the movements of the bountiful stars. So greatly did the soundness of this timing avail Roman interests and make up for the mistakes of earlier commanders, and transform the adversity which had occurred, that Constantine immediately fell into the hands of the enemy.[14]

Also in Book II, Choniates digresses from his account of the recovery of Corfu from the Sicilians to tell the story of the deposition of the Patriarch Kosmas, which he presents as an act of gross injustice on the emperor's part.[15]

Book III, which deals mainly with Manuel's expedition to Cilicia and Syria in 1158–9 and with his relations with the Seljuk Sultan Kılıç Arslan II, contains no direct criticism of the emperor. However, it does pick up the theme which was stated in Book II à propos of the Patriarch Kosmas and is subsequently developed, in Book IV, into a general denunciation of Manuel's shabby treatment of certain high-ranking individuals. According to Choniates, the emperor's chief minister Theodore Styppeiotes, his cousin Andronikos Komnenos and his niece's husband Alexios Axouch all suffered disgrace and punishment because they were the victims of malicious accusations. While in Book III the author implies that Manuel was an unwitting accomplice in the injustice done to Styppeiotes,[16] in Book IV he clearly identifies the ruler's jealousy and paranoia as the root of the evil that befell the other two:

Every ruler is fearful and suspicious and enjoys behaving like Death and Chaos and Erebos in lopping off noble summits and removing every high and imposing man, rejecting every good counsellor, cutting down every brave and valiant general. The lords of the earth thoroughly resemble lofty and high-plumed pine trees; for just as these murmur in light gusts of wind, furiously shaking the needles on their branches, so do the former suspect the man who abounds in wealth and tremble at the one who stands out from the crowd for his valour. And if a certain man should have the beauty of a statue and the tongue of a songbird, and be charming in manner, he does not allow the wearer of the crown to relax or be calm, but disturbs his sleep, ruins his

[14] Chon., pp. 95–6. [15] Chon., pp. 79–81. [16] Chon., pp. 111–13.

pleasure, spoils his enjoyment and causes him worries. And he [the ruler] wrongly curses Nature who created him for also having fashioned other suitable candidates for power, and for not having made him the first and last to excel among men. So they [rulers] mostly fight against Providence and take up arms against the Divinity, culling all good men from the crowd and slaughtering them like sacrificial victims, so that they themselves may squander away in peace and have the public finances to themselves as a paternal inheritance to do with as they please, and treat free men as slaves, and behave towards men who are sometimes worthier to rule than they as if they were hired servants. [They do this] being mistaken in their minds, having lost their reason under the influence of power and misguidedly forgetting what happened the day before yesterday.[17]

After narrating the tragic fall of Alexios Axouch, Choniates adds that justice caught up with his accusers:

Whether indeed it took retribution from Manuel for this unjust action is not a matter to be discussed at the present time. Yet Manuel, being a wise man, neither unlearned nor unlettered, should not have paid attention to the Alpha which was to succeed him and dissolve his power, but should have made fast the mooring-ropes of power on Him who said that He is Alpha and Omega, as John teaches me in Revelation.[18]

Choniates evidently traced Manuel's suspicion of Andronikos and Alexios to his belief in the prophecy that the name of his successor would begin with the letter A.[19] The author's observations here thus tie in with his disapproval of Manuel's belief in astrology. This disapproval is twice expressed in Book V. The first instance is in the account of the battle of Semlin against the Hungarians (1167). Just as the Byzantine commander was preparing for battle, a letter came from Manuel ordering him to put off the engagement:

That day was rejected as inauspicious and altogether unsuitable for hostilities, because Manuel ascribed the majority and the greatest of ventures, which obtain their fulfilment or otherwise from God, to the combinations, positions and movements of the stars, and submitted himself to the utterances of the astrologers as if these were decisions from the throne of God.[20]

The commander completely ignored the order and went on to win a great victory. Later, writing of the birth of Manuel's son Alexios in 1169, Choniates remarks that 'although the emperor stood by his wife and relieved her pains through his presence, he gave most of his

[17] Chon., p. 143.
[18] Chon., p. 146.
[19] The initial letters of the four emperors from Alexios I would thus spell AIMA, the Greek word for blood: see Chon., p. 169; below, p. 200.
[20] Chon., p. 154.

attention to the man who was watching the stars and gaping at the heavens'.[21]

Slightly earlier in Book V, Choniates introduces his account of the expedition Manuel sent to Egypt in 1169 by sharply criticising this enterprise as a piece of megalomania. The emperor was led to it, he says, in spite of other problems which still required attention, by 'untimely ambition and a desire to rival emperors whose renown had been great, and whose bounds had stretched not only from sea to sea, but from the eastern horizon to the Pillars of Hercules'.[22]

Book VI is devoted to Manuel's Turkish wars from 1175 to 1179, and mainly to the expedition against Konya which came to grief in 1176. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, in view of the remark just quoted, Choniates does not criticise the expedition as overambitious. His main criticism is of the strategic error of judgement which the emperor committed in rejecting the peace overtures which he received from the sultan during the march. This he did against the advice of his older and wiser commanders, 'giving ear entirely to his relatives, especially to those who had never heard the sound of the war trumpet and had shining heads of hair and bright faces, and wore gold chains and necklaces of pearls and transparent precious stones'.[23] On the whole, Manuel is given credit for fighting bravely and resourcefully during the appalling slaughter and panic that ensued when the Turks ambushed the long, straggling Byzantine columns as they passed through the defile of Myriokephalon. It is noted, however, that even Manuel's strength of purpose began to fail under the strain, and that when the emperor had managed to fight his way through the pass to join the survivors, he showed signs of an unbalanced mind and shocked his commanders by suggesting that he and they should slip away leaving the rank and file to the mercy of the Turks.[24] There is another hint of mental instability in the description of the contradictory reports which Manuel sent to Constantinople after he had made peace with the sultan and returned to safety at Philadelphia: at one moment he likened himself to Romanos Diogenes, the emperor who had led his forces to defeat at Manzikert a century earlier; at another he boasted that the treaty with the sultan had been made under the imperial flag as this waved in the breeze and struck terror into the enemy.[25] Choniates also tells an anecdote in which he expresses indirect criticism. The emperor asked for water from a nearby stream, but when it was brought he threw most of it away, realising that it was polluted, and exclaimed that it was not right for him to drink Christian blood. A common soldier, hearing this, replied that this would not be the first time Manuel had tasted of

[21] Chon., p. 169. [22] Chon., p. 160. [23] Chon., p. 179.
[24] Chon., pp. 186–7. [25] Chon., p. 191.

his subjects' blood – he had already drunk deeply of it through his oppressive taxation. Shortly afterwards, as Manuel noticed that his campaign treasure was being robbed by the Turks, he urged the Greeks to fight and take it for themselves. The same man rejoined that Manuel should have made his offer when the money was easier to obtain.[26]

In Book VII Choniates summarises and concludes his account of the reign. He begins with a discussion of Manuel's western policy. This

> brought ridicule on the emperor from the Greeks. They claimed that he nurtured foreign ambitions for personal glory, and had his eyes on the ends of the earth, doing all kinds of hot-blooded and foolhardy things to push beyond the boundaries that former emperors had established, pouring out to no purpose the money which he collected by combing his empire with fiscal assessments and exhausting it with unwonted taxes.[27]

These accusations were not fully justified, says Choniates, since the policy did not constitute an unreasonable innovation, but was a natural response to the matchless strength of the Latins, who had to be prevented from uniting in alliance against the empire. However, no attempt is made to justify Manuel's financial policy, which is characterised as both rapacious and wasteful. Few of the emperor's subjects benefited from his lavish generosity; he showered his wealth upon foreigners, especially Latins, and members of his family, notably his mistress Theodora and her son by him. Being highly susceptible to his household servants and to his barbarian underlings, 'whose speech was preceded by spittle', he appointed them to important financial offices. Some of them amassed great wealth and lived like kings, even though they did not possess the bare rudiments of an Hellenic education. He trusted them so much that he gave them judicial duties which would have tested the expertise of trained lawyers. In the fiscal administration of the provinces, too, foreigners were given the senior posts, with learned Greeks placed under them. This was because Manuel distrusted the Greeks as embezzlers, although in fact his trusty barbarians cheated him in the very way he had hoped to avoid, with only a fraction of the tax yield reaching the treasury.

Choniates goes on to mention Manuel's building activity and his monastic patronage, both of which he portrays in a not unfavourable light. However, he is scathing on the subject of the emperor's granting of lands in military *pronoia*. Such grants, he maintains, ceased to be rewards for military excellence, but became available to all men who could afford a horse and a small down-payment. As a result, 'those who formerly had only the fisc as master suffered dreadfully

[26] Chon., pp. 185–6.

[27] Chon., p. 203.

from the greed of the military', whom Greeks were forced 'to serve in the manner of slaves'; often a fine upstanding native would find himself paying taxes to some common half-barbarian who was vastly his inferior as a warrior. The effect on the imperial provinces was plain to see – those that had not been snatched by enemies had been laid waste by their own defenders.[28]

There follows a long section in which Choniates discusses Manuel's interference in doctrinal matters:

> It is not enough for most emperors of the Romans simply to rule, and wear gold, and treat common property as their own and free men as slaves, but if they do not appear wise, godlike in looks, heroic in strength, full of holy wisdom like Solomon, divinely inspired dogmatists and more canonical than the canons – in short, unerring experts in all human and divine affairs – they think they have suffered grievous wrong. While it is proper for men whose profession is to know and teach about God to punish, or indeed anathematise, those people who are so uneducated and brash as to introduce unaccustomed and new doctrines, the emperors cannot bear to be second to anyone even in this, but they themselves introduce, judge and determine dogma, and often punish those who disagree with them.
>
> And this emperor, who happened to have a ready tongue and a natural way with words, not only issued numerous ordinances, but composed catechetical orations, which they call *silentia*, and delivered them in public. As time went on, he branched out into sacred doctrine and discussed the nature of God. Often feigning uncertainty, he raised scriptural problems and asked questions concerning their solutions, mustering all the learning in which he rejoiced. He would have been praiseworthy in this if he had taken his self-indulgence no further and had not gone into more elusive doctrines, or, in looking at these, had not insisted on having his own way or twisted the sense of the words to his own purpose, defining and applying interpretations in matters where the Fathers had already pronounced in the right sense, as if he comprehended Christ entirely and had been let into the secret of His nature clearly and divinely.[29]

As examples of this irresponsible dogmatising, Choniates points to Manuel's role in the major doctrinal controversies of his reign, as well as to his proposal at the end of his life to alter the references to Allah in the catechism for converts from Islam.[30] The change was forced on the clergy despite strong protests from the patriarch and other bishops. In connection with this episode, Choniates digresses to tell of a prophecy made by his own godfather Niketas, Bishop of Chonai, at the beginning of the reign. Manuel had stopped at Chonai on his way to Constantinople from Cilicia, and had received the bishop's blessing in the church of the Archangel Michael. Some of the local clergy had expressed doubt as to whether such a young man would

[28] Chon., pp. 208–9. [29] Chon., pp. 209–10. [30] Chon., pp. 213ff.

be able to govern an empire, especially since his elder brother Isaac was already established in the imperial palace. The bishop answered their doubts by saying that Manuel would indeed rule the empire and would live slightly longer than his grandfather Alexios, 'and as his end approaches he will go mad'. Some saw this as a reference to Manuel's greed for money, while others identified the mania as some other fleshly sin. But when the controversial formula concerning the Muslim deity became known, everyone agreed that this fulfilled the prophecy, since it was obviously sheer madness.[31]

Concluding with an account of Manuel's last illness and death, Choniates takes a last opportunity to ridicule, and condemn as dangerously irresponsible, the emperor's belief in divination and astrology:

> He did not accept that his end was drawing near, but insisted that he knew for certain that another fourteen years of life had been lavished on him. He said this to the wise and thrice-blessed Patriarch Theodosios who suggested that he take paternal thought for the affairs of state while his mind was still healthy, and seek out a man who would selflessly care for the boy-heir to the throne until he came of age, and loyally put the Empress before himself and care for her as if she were his own mother. But those pestilential astrologers had the audacity to say that the emperor would shortly recover from his illness and, so they said, devote himself to love affairs, and they shamelessly predicted the razing of enemy cities to the ground. What was more outrageous, they, being quick-tongued and used to lying, foretold a great commotion of the universe, conjunctions and combinations of the stars, the eruption of violent winds; they practically predicted the transformation of the whole natural order, thus proving themselves ventriloquists rather than stargazers. They not only enumerated the years and months and told the weeks in which these things would happen, and notified the emperor accordingly; they also specified the days and snatched the fleeting moment of the hour, as if they had clear knowledge of the things which the Father has kept in His own power, and about which Our Saviour reprimanded his disciples for asking. So not only did the emperor himself seek out caves and sheltered recesses and prepare them for habitation and have the glass removed from the imperial palaces so that they should not be damaged by the blasts of wind which lay in store; but those too who were enrolled in his service and his kin, as well as those who insinuated themselves by flattery, also diligently occupied themselves in the same way, so that while some burrowed like ants, others made tents, entwining ropes and sharpening pegs in order to fasten them securely.[32]

It must be stressed that the passages we have quoted are not the whole picture painted by Choniates, but patches of shadow which add depth to an otherwise luminous portrait. Choniates does not

[31] Chon., p. 219. [32] Chon., pp. 220–1.

criticise Manuel as consistently or as savagely as he criticises later emperors – the paranoid, schizophrenic, licentious Andronikos I; the vain, vindictive Isaac II; the feeble, henpecked Alexios III – all of whom he clearly does blame for the disasters suffered by the empire in the generation before 1204. Nevertheless, the colours which he uses to blacken these figures are essentially the same as those which darken his portrait of Manuel. Andronikos, Isaac and Alexios are all ridiculed for their reliance on prophecy as a substitute for faith in God and resolute, constructive decision-making. Andronikos and Isaac are both, in different ways, criticised for their autocratic handling of church affairs. Andronikos' persecution of the nobility is presented as one of the worst features of his tyranny. Promiscuous and incestuous sexuality are emphasised in him, as are extravagance and megalomania in Isaac. These flaws are first identified in Manuel and, as we have seen, Choniates explicitly connects him with later rulers by broadening his criticism of Manuel into criticism of an imperial type. The connection is implicit, moreover, in passages where the author, while not criticising Manuel directly, calls attention to traits which are presented negatively in later emperors. In Manuel's moment of panic at Myriokephalon, we have a glimpse of the failure of nerve occasionally displayed by Andronikos I and Alexios III, and in his contradictory reports of the battle we have a premonition of Andronikos' violent fluctuations of mood. In some ways, indeed, Andronikos emerges from the *History* as an exaggerated version of Manuel; Choniates may have wanted to suggest that the excesses of his reign were the product of his unequal rivalry with his cousin.[33] Certain apparently neutral remarks which Choniates makes about Manuel's concern with appearances also take on an extra dimension when viewed in the light of later passages. Thus in Book II he describes how Manuel enhanced the effect of the triumph which he held after his first Hungarian campaign by dressing up the captives to look more distinguished than they really were, and by parading them in a succession of small groups in order to create the impression of a never-ending multitude.[34] In the account of the Myriokephalon campaign, as we have seen, he makes a point of mentioning the gold chains and jewelled necklaces worn by those young men in Manuel's entourage who gave him wrong advice.[35] At the end of Book VI he observes that Manuel was more respected and loved when he endured the hardships of campaigning 'than when he was crowned with a diadem and robed in purple and mounted his horse with its gold trappings'.[36] The reference to 'wearing gold' as one of the less attractive attributes of imperial power should be seen in the same context. All these remarks

[33] Magdalino and Nelson, 'Emperor', pp. 176–7.
[34] Chon., p. 93.
[35] Chon., p. 179.
[36] Chon., p. 198.